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EPIDEMIOLOGY DIVISION

Published by authority of
the Honourable John Munro
Minister of National Health and Welfare

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Deputy Minister of National Welfare

The time has come when we must speak frankly to you about V.D. The number of new cases of V.D. has risen steadily over the last few years with the greatest increase among teenagers and young adults. Young people need to know more about V.D., and we would like to explain to you, simply but honestly, the cause and consequences of these diseases.

WHAT DOES V.D. STAND FOR?

V.D. means venereal diseases. In Canada there are two different diseases caused by different germs; they are called syphilis and gonorrhea.

HOW DO YOU GET V.D.?

Venereal diseases are caught from infected individuals. Both syphilis and gonorrhea are spread through sexual intercourse between persons of the opposite sex, and also between persons of the same sex. The incidence of venereal disease in homosexuals has become a special problem within the past few years.

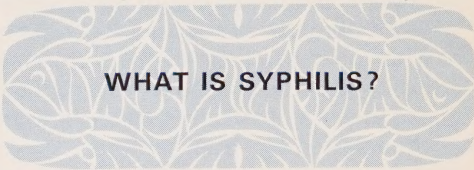
You must realize :

- 1 Venereal diseases are transmitted, with rare exceptions, through intimate

sexual contact. Contrary to popular belief, they are not spread by contact with toilet seats, doorknobs, shaking hands, handling money, etc. Lifting and straining have nothing to do with acquiring these diseases.

- 2 No reliance can be placed on contraceptives as a means of preventing infection.
- 3 There is no immunity to the venereal diseases — you can have a venereal disease any number of times.





WHAT IS SYPHILIS?

Syphilis is the more serious of the venereal diseases. It is an infection that follows sexual intercourse with a person who has the disease in an infective stage. It affects both males and females in much the same way. When not adequately treated it may cause heart failure, blindness, paralysis, mental deterioration and may eventually lead to death.

The first sign of syphilis is usually a sore which develops between 10 and 90 days after exposure. It appears at the place where the germs enter the body, usually in the genital area. The sore may be so small that it goes unnoticed. It may be hidden inside a woman's sex organs where it cannot be seen, and because it is painless, often remains undiscovered.

This first sore, called a chancre (pronounced shanker), may look like a pimple, or an ulcer. It is full of syphilis germs, and the disease may be passed along very

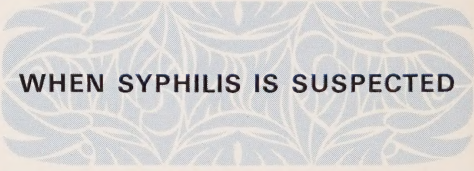
easily to anyone who comes into intimate bodily contact at this stage of infection. Even without treatment the sore will disappear, but this does not mean that the trouble has ended. The germs are still increasing in number, and spreading through the whole body.

From 3 to 6 weeks later a rash may show up. It may look like measles, a heat rash or hives. It may cover the body, or it may appear only on the hands and feet. Sores may develop in the mouth. Sore throat, fever, or headache may occur. Hair may fall out in patches. During this stage, the disease may also be readily passed on by sexual intercourse or by kissing if mouth sores are present. Because this stage of infection can resemble many other diseases, some persons are unaware of the true nature of their illness. Only a medical examination and blood test will tell with certainty.

Like the chancre, these other symptoms also will disappear in time without any treatment. But the disease is still active in the body. A person may continue to feel fine, and may go along for years thinking he is healthy and not infected. He may then become blind,


crippled, suffer heart trouble or brain damage. Even in this late stage of syphilis, one can be treated and cured of the infection, but the damage to the body can only be arrested and never be repaired.

An expectant mother may have syphilis without knowing it, and she can pass it to her unborn child. This can result in the child being born dead or with a permanent physical defect. The best way to avoid such a tragedy is for every expectant mother to have a routine blood test as early as possible in pregnancy. Proper treatment of the pregnant woman cures her of the infection and ensures the birth of a child free from syphilis.



WHEN SYPHILIS IS SUSPECTED

If a person suspects he may have syphilis he should consult a qualified medical doctor at once. Only after a physical examination and necessary laboratory tests can a diagnosis of syphilis be made.



WHAT IS GONORRHEA?

Gonorrhea is the more common of the venereal diseases. Many people believe this disease is not serious. This is not true. Gonorrhea may cause sterility and arthritis. Prompt and proper treatment is important to prevent such serious complications.

The symptoms of gonorrhea usually appear from 2 to 5 days after sexual intercourse with an infected person. Common symptoms are a discharge of pus from the urinary passage, and a painful burning sensation during urination. Although these signs usually develop in males, women frequently will have no signs or symptoms of the disease. In such cases a woman can unwittingly pass the disease on to the person with whom she has sexual relations.

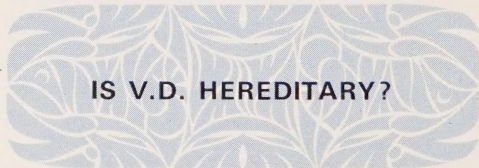
A woman with gonorrhea may not feel any ill effects until it spreads internally to other reproductive organs. She then may

become acutely ill and require hospital treatment. Sterility may be the end result of infection in both men and women. Another complication which may occur in both sexes is arthritis. This condition can cause permanent crippling of the joints.



WHEN GONORRHEA IS SUSPECTED

As with syphilis, if a person suspects he is infected he should go to a qualified medical doctor at once. The diagnosis will be made by the doctor after he has examined the patient and made certain laboratory tests.



IS V.D. HEREDITARY?

Venereal diseases are not hereditary in the strict sense of the word. It is possible

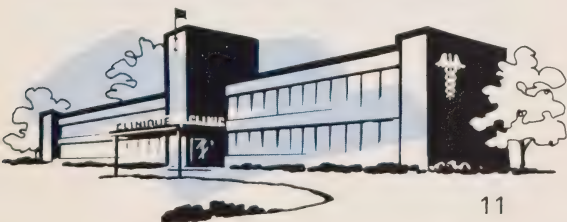
for a pregnant woman who has untreated syphilis to pass the disease to her unborn child, but this has nothing to do with the factors responsible for inheritance. Infants infected in this way suffer what is termed congenital syphilis.

A pregnant woman, suffering from gonorrhea may pass the infection to the eyes of her baby at the time of delivery. If untreated this condition can lead to permanent blindness in the infant.

CAN V.D. BE CURED?

Yes, both syphilis and gonorrhea can be cured. The earlier treatment is started, the easier the diseases are to cure.

Self-treatment with pills, salves or ointments is useless and dangerous.



Unqualified persons who advertise themselves as specialists in "social diseases" or "men's diseases" are quacks and should be avoided. If a person has any of the signs of syphilis or gonorrhea, he should consult his doctor or health department immediately.

Free treatment centres are maintained in many cities throughout Canada. Your local health department can direct you to the nearest centre. Names and personal information remain strictly confidential, and the individual is treated tactfully and efficiently by trained personnel. For these reasons most persons have access to speedy, effective treatment and owe it to themselves and society, to seek and obtain medical care if the faintest suspicion exists that infection has been acquired.

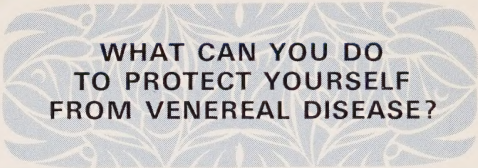
CAN THE SPREAD OF V.D. BE STOPPED?

Individual treatment is important, but the disease must have been caught

from someone ; perhaps even passed on to someone else before any symptoms were noticed. It is therefore of the utmost importance that each infected person give the names of previous sexual contacts to his or her doctor, so that they may be offered treatment, thereby preventing further spread of the infection.



One's first reaction when asked to give names of sexual contacts is fear of being labeled a "squealer". After reading of the consequences of untreated infection, and the ease with which a cure can be achieved if treatment is started early, one would actually be doing his sexual contacts a favour by helping to arrange for their examination. The doctor may obtain the help of trained public health personnel who use the utmost tact in followup. One's name is never revealed. Only with this procedure is it possible to stop the spread of V.D.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM VENEREAL DISEASE?

- 1 Practice good moral conduct. Avoid promiscuity. Group activities — sports, music, drama and other recreational activities sponsored by school, church or community are healthy alternatives to prevalent practices of too-early dating, going steady and pairing off under conditions which favor sexual intimacy.
- 2 Know the facts. Do not hesitate to discuss frankly the subject of venereal disease with your parents, family physician, public health nurse, clergy or teachers. Further information can be obtained from your local or provincial health department.
- 3 Don't take chances. If you have run the risk of catching venereal disease, immediately consult your physician or health department for proper examination and treatment.

